

From engineers to accountants, information systems to tribal relations, Native Americans serve in varied positions at BPA. And they bring a perspective that helps expand the thinking of people from other cultures.

"I try to help BPA people see the connection between BPA issues, the land, the people and the ecosystem," says Darrell Eastman, BPA tribal liaison. "Water is our most precious resource. Whatever we do to it, we do to ourselves."

Patricia Tawney, another BPA tribal liaison is also a Native American. She sees the issue the same way but says it differently. "It's suicide to think of water as no more than a commodity," she says.

New ways of looking at things. It's a way of seeing with your heart, Eastman says, that Native Americans do naturally. "We're all human beings," he says, "we're just raised to think differently."

Events like November's American Indian Heritage Month, with art shows and guest speakers and exhibitions, are created specifically to celebrate, to inform and to connect.

With an eye toward appreciating the contributions and the experiences of Native Americans in BPA's workforce, here are some snapshots of several members of BPA's American Indian/Alaskan Native Council.

Darrell Eastman

Darrell Eastman came to work at BPA in 1971 as an engineering technician. From 1985-1995, he reviewed weatherization products for BPA's conservation programs. But it was only recently that he finally ended up "where I was meant to be."

As a BPA tribal liaison, Eastman believes that his work in "bringing issues to the tribes and creating opportunities for relationship building," reaches way beyond BPA's four-state region. "This region is strong enough that we can have an impact nationally and in the world," he says.

"The whole United States is envious of the Pacific Northwest. This is the last frontier of the lower 48, and the whole region is trying to save it," Eastman says.

As a Native American from the northern

Cheyenne tribe, Eastman has seen BPA advance dramatically in the past five to ten years in its awareness of cultural issues. But the opportunities for Indians to get work with BPA are still limited. He's had friends who've applied and interviewed "and can't seem to get over the hump."

Ann Astorga-Juarez

Ann Juarez is from the Tlinget nation, one of the indigenous peoples of southeast Alaska that have lived there for thousands of years. Her family comes from Juneau, Alaska. Juarez has been at BPA since 1985. She came from the U.S. Forest Service and has held a variety of jobs at BPA. Today she is a computer specialist in transmission's support services.

Juarez is concerned about recruiting efforts.

"BPA's Native American population is decreasing at a steady rate with no attempt to hire more," she says. She is also concerned about water and fish issues. The Tlinget's, including her family, have always earned their livelihood from the sea.

Juarez says, "Non-Indian peoples need to learn to respect mother earth since everything

they do to her, she repays in kind. This includes global warming, the increase in flooding and other natural disasters."

Alivia Long

Alivia Long has been a contractor at BPA since 1984. She is part of the Creek tribe – originally from Georgia, Alabama and parts of Florida – that relocated to Oklahoma during the Trail of Tears. Her children take great pride in their heritage, she says, "which is something that my mother is happy to see."

"It hasn't always been easy for American Indians to come forward," she says. Her great grandfather, for instance, changed his Indian name "to something more acceptable." Long worked in land until 1995, then moved to the disbursement operations group. She does a variety of administrative tasks

in support of accounts payable, travel and payroll.

Native Americans at BPA

Karen Graves-Pyrch

Karen Graves-Pyrch came to BPA in 1978 as a co-op student in the financial group. She was the first co-op student hired outside of engineering. After she graduated in 1981, she joined BPA as an accountant. Aside from a three-year stint in energy resources, she has worked in various incarnations of financial services at BPA ever since. Today, she works in accounting operations.

Pyrch is enrolled with the Absentee Shawnee tribe in Oklahoma. Born in Portland to parents who worked for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, she lived on a reservation in North Carolina for part of the time she was growing up. How is it to be a Native American working for BPA?

"I see it not so much as an Indian but just as a person," she says, "and it's good."

"But there aren't many Indians left at BPA," she says. The Native American resource group has dwindled. She hopes BPA can recruit to bring more Native Americans to BPA. "There are Indian recruiting efforts that could be done more locally to be successful," she says. Pyrch cites the past practice of sending recruiters to the Southwest.

Patricia Tawney

Patricia Tawney is a member of the Isleta Pueblo (Naatooih). "We like to say that New Mexico is *around* us, we're not *in* New Mexico," she says. "The Isleta people have been dealing with EuroAmerican impacts since the era of the Spanish Inquisition. We were certainly here long before New Mexico existed," she says.

While Tawney believes her Indian heritage helped her get her current job as tribal liaison, she had much to learn. "What you know about pueblos is not what you need to know about Lower Columbia River treaty tribes." And she's learned a lot. "I have been so privileged to work with such incredible elders in this job," she says. "They're people of great wisdom who articulate for their culture."

At BPA since 1988 (she also did a five-year stint in the BPA Law Library from 1971-76), Tawney sees the BPA culture as dominated by EuroAmerican values. Money is the bottom line, giving rise to proposals like buying out Native American fishing rights. "Fishing is a civil liberty to tribal people," she says. "It's freedom, not only food. Would you sell your First Amendment free speech rights?"

On the other hand, she says, "I give BPA huge credit for realizing it needed to do something and for trying to do it. BPA is way ahead of other federal agencies in our efforts to build relationships with tribal governments. I'm pretty proud of BPA in that respect."

Evelyn Hartman

"I'm pretty much a jack of all trades," says Evelyn Hartman of her job in the Power Business Line information systems working on Y2K. And throughout her almost 20 years at BPA, Hartman has been everywhere and done everything. At one time she was the only BPA person who'd visited every BPA site in the region.

Starting out as a first aid instructor, she went on to project management in maintenance, and then to billing and contract information systems. In the process, she lived in Seattle, Spokane and Portland.

Hartman has arranged the art show for Native American Heritage month each year. Perhaps her greatest triumph was three

years ago when

more than \$8 million of Indian art was displayed at BPA headquarters and the "Good Morning America" TV show visited. In one weekend, 100 tribes and dignitaries came through to see the display.

"They went home and reported back to their tribes, and there starts to be a realization that BPA is friendly," she says.

"The minority issues are not insurmountable if people are willing to mentor," she says. That's something she's done for many years over the course of her career and as a spiritual counselor for her Iroquois/Nottaway tribe. "My current organization and supervisor are great," she says. "I feel absolutely free to discuss any cultural issues."

Randy Ridenhour

"The Native Americans that work at BPA can help bring an understanding of our culture to this agency," says Randy Ridenhour, a manager in transmission's support services group. "This is important because of BPA's government-to-government relationship with the tribes and our work with them."

At BPA since 1981, Ridenhour has held a succession of personnel and other staff manager jobs in Portland, Vancouver and Spokane. This July he was appointed manager of the 130 people regionwide who handle BPA's transportation, warehouses, hazardous materials and procurement.

Ridenhour's grandfather was Cherokee, and for the first five years of his life Ridenhour lived on a Navajo reservation in northern Arizona. "I actually spoke the language pretty fluently," he says. Later, he went to school outside of Phoenix. A large number of his schoolmates were from the Apache tribe. The cultures of the three tribes were radically different, he says.

Regardless of their tribe, Ridenhour says, Native Americans all work very hard to keep their culture alive. And, while BPA is the best he's seen in giving employees flexibility to satisfy their cultural needs, he says it's hard for an organization as large as this. Ultimately, individuality can get lost in the organization-wide pursuit of "goals and objectives." ◀

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